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E-heutagogy for lifelong e-learning

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Abstract

The paper aims to introduce a new concept: e-heutagogy. This aim is approached through two sub-objectives:

- a) Giving the rationale for the new concept of e-heutagogy.
- b) Outlining the features of e-heutagogy necessary for lifelong e-learning.

Why do we need a new concept? Learning is a complex concept and it is a part of our entire life. Today we can speak about new generations of learners at all levels, from kindergarten to university, not only due to technology but also due to rapid changes in open, heterogeneous, dynamic and uncertain environments.

Taking into account that heutagogy is appropriate to the needs of learners but learners are most of their life without their teachers and a big part of them are in fact e-learners, it seems obvious that heutagogy and e-learning share the same road and the same direction. The new concept stems from heutagogy but it enriched it by bringing new facets and connects it with lifelong e-learning.

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1. Introduction

Heutagogy as a concept was introduced by Stewart Hase of Southern Cross University and is the study of self-determined learning. If we talk about a heutagogical approach to learning it "...recognises the need to be flexible in the learning where the teacher provides resources but the learner designs the actual course he or she might take by negotiating the learning" [1] and it "...is characterized first and foremost by *learner-centeredness* in terms of both learner-generated contexts and content." [2] Wikipedia's definition of lifelong learning is "the "lifelong, voluntary, and self-motivated" pursuit of knowledge for either personal or professional reasons." [3] In UNESCO - Medium-term strategy 2008–2013 it is mentioned that "...there is an immediate need to make lifelong learning an integral part of the whole educational system, indeed of the entire social and economic fabric." [4] "E-learning is essentially the computer and network-enabled transfer of skills and knowledge." [5] If we take into account the previous two definitions we can define lifelong e-learning as the computer and network-enabled transfer of skills and knowledge lifelong, voluntary, and self-motivated, for either personal or professional reasons. Is it possible that lifelong e-learning has a heutagogical approach? I think that the answer is yes and this is the rationale for the new concept of e-heutagogy. Another reason is that "people have the potential to learn continuously and in real time by interacting

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with their environment” [6] but due to the today’s context of “open, heterogeneous, dynamic and uncertain environments (OHDUE)” [7] e-learning must be improved continuously.

2. Why e-heutagogy?

The answer to this question is in connection with the answer to other two questions:

What makes e-learning so important, sometimes more important than learning?

What makes us e-learn throughout our entire life?

An answer to the first question could be definitely the expansion of the Internet and IT means. An analysis made by Ambient Insight Research in a report which forecasts the revenues for Self-paced e-learning products and services across seven regions: North America, Latin America, Western Europe, Eastern Europe, Asia, Middle East, and Africa shows that “The worldwide market for Self-paced e-learning products and services reached \$32.1 billion in 2010. The five-year compound annual growth rate (CAGR) is 9.2% and revenues will grow to \$49.9 billion by 2015.”[8]

A project released in the United States in December 2010 entitled “Digital learning now!” shows that “Digital learning has the potential to be a catalyst for transformational change in education” and “.... allows students to learn in their own style at their own pace, which maximizes their opportunity for success in school and beyond.” [9] So it is obvious that e-learning is a priority and not only for the educational system.

The second question is not so easy to answer because we must take into account a lot of aspects, but I think that a starting point can be the Self-Determination Theory. The theory, a theory of motivation, was initially developed by Edward L. Deci and Richard M. Ryan, at the University of Rochester, and comprises five mini-theories. “The interplay between the extrinsic forces acting on persons and the intrinsic motives and needs inherent in human nature is the territory of Self-Determination Theory”. [10] The Self-Determination Theory was applied in many domains including education and is connected to the new concept of e-heutagogy.

In order to prove this connection I made a small experiment with my students. At the beginning of the Computer Assisted Instruction (CAI) course I applied a test in order to determine the learning styles of each of my students. One of the assessment tasks asked the students to choose a subject in which they were interested, to find some tutorials for this subject and to choose one in order to learn this subject. At the end, each student presented the subject and the tutorial to the entire group and had to argue why he chose that particular tutorial out of the others. The result was that the choice was made in relation with their learning styles. In this experiment I wanted to apply the Self-Determination Theory to e-learning: in our case the educational software was “the extrinsic force” and the chosen subject was “the intrinsic motivation”. The result points out that we can adapt educational softwares, in my example to the learning styles, in order to motivate the e-learner extrinsically, and this can be a component of self-determination, so we can speak about a heutagogical approach to e-learning. The experiment used a tutorial from the Internet as educational software, but if we talk about an e-learning system, in order to have heutagogical features it must be complex and adaptive. The study of e-heutagogy is at the beginning, so I think that a definition is premature, but it seems obvious that the three pillars of e-heutagogy are the self-determination theory, e-learning and complex e-learning adaptive systems.

3. Conclusions and further development

Learning is a complex concept and it is a part of our entire life. Nowadays IT means and technologies have the power to customize education for each and every student and we can speak about new generations of learners at all levels, from kindergarten to university. For these generations new concepts and tools must be developed in order to update education. Taking into account that heutagogy meets the needs of learners but learners are most of their life without their teachers and a big part of them are in fact e-learners, a heutagogical approach to e-learning is desirable. The new concept e-heutagogy fills this gap.

This subject will be further elaborated on as part of a research PhD paper at “Lucian Blaga” University of Sibiu.

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